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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/11/2016

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM TO UNITY TEAM MEMBERS: TIME'S UP

Classified By: COM TINA S. KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: COM met individually with members of Kosovo's Unity Team (UT) August 9-11 to lay down a direct and unambiguous marker: the time is now to come to closure with UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Marti Ahtisaari on the issues of decentralization and minority rights. COM underscored USG disappointment in the Kosovar team's performance in the last round of Vienna technical talks, and emphasized that failure to close the gap on these issues during the upcoming visit of Ahtisaari and his experts to Pristina the week of August 22 would endanger the entire settlement process. President Sejdiu promised the COM intensified leadership, and to that end convened a special meeting of the Unity Team August 10 to galvanize their efforts. COM made special interventions with PDK deputy leader Fatmir Limaj (party president Hashim Thaci remains on vacation) and ORA leader Vetton Surroi, who is heading up the Unity Team working group on minority rights. With all UT members, COM cautioned against complacency regarding the "inevitability" of independence. She warned that allowing political differences to divide the team and failure to reach agreement on the Ahtisaari proposals would make it almost impossible to achieve Contact Group consensus on the status process and the ultimate way forward. End summary.

12. (C) COM met August 9-11 with key members of the Kosovar "Unity Team," including President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Ceku, coordinator Blerim Shala, Presidential Advisor Skender Hyseni, PDK Deputy Leader Fatmir Limaj (substituting for the absent Hashim Thaci), and ORA opposition leader Vetton Surroi. In her meeting with Sejdiu August 9, COM stressed that the results of the discussions during the technical talks in Vienna on August 7 and 8 had been very disappointing to the USG. If the Kosovars were hoping for a desultory back and forth with UNOSEK on the key issues of decentralization and minority rights, or worse yet believed that they could hold out on their positions because "independence was inevitable anyway" they were very much mistaken. She underscored that there simply was no more time to close the remaining gaps with UNOSEK, and she warned that the risk of stubbornly maintaining a distance in the negotiation would be to undermine Ahtisaari's ability to gain Contact Group and Security Council consensus for his status proposals. Sejdiu

gravely acknowledged the risk involved, and pledged to exert renewed leadership to bridge the remaining gaps. (Note: The President followed up by calling a meeting of the entire Unity Team August 10; from readouts of the meeting offered by various members, he exhorted them to intensify their work and finalize discussions with the UNOSEK team during the upcoming end of August visit.)

13. (C) COM held two separate meetings with PDK deputy party leader Fatmir Limaj and ORA president Veton Surroi. COM made it clear to both that political differences with the governing LDK-AAK coalition must not get in the way of the status process and the unity of the Kosovar team. Limaj noted the difficulty of presenting some of the proposed decentralization measures to his party constituency, argued that Kosovo must maintain "functionality," and complained about LDK efforts to seize credit and profile as a result of the Vienna negotiation process. COM countered that "selling" the decentralization and minority rights provisions of the settlement to the Kosovar Albanian public was a matter of leadership; it was a very small price to pay to offer the Serbs guarantees of asymmetric decentralization when in all likelihood there would be no more than a handful of universities or hospitals built in Serb municipalities. On the LDK's assertion of political primacy in the talks, COM noted that the Unity Team functioned and must continue to function as an integral whole -- no one individual or party would gain credit for a successful status outcome, but those who hindered the process would inevitably be singled out for obstructionism. Limaj agreed that the onus rested on the Kosovar team to close the distance with Ahtissari and pledged to enlist PDK support. Surroi, as well, claimed that he would work with UNOSEK over the coming week to sharpen the Unity Team's proposals on minority rights and address UNOSEK

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concerns.

14. (C) Comment: Speaking individually to the members of the Unity Team, they understand the stakes involved and appear to be getting their act together to make a productive showing during UNOSEK's late August trip to Pristina. But clearly the fragility of the team and the intrusion of political animosity is beginning to show; it will be our job to keep them focused on the larger goals of the status process and continue to caution against allowing ambitions to outweigh good sense.

15. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW